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*Memorandum on the superstitions connected with child birth, and precautions taken and rites performed on the occasion of the birth of a child among the Jâts of Hoshiyárpur in the Panjáb.*—By SIRDÁR GURDYAL SINGH.

I have selected the above subject as I think it will give a clear insight into the superstitions of the rural population; for a native woman can never omit to do anything, however ludicrous it may appear to others, which may be thought necessary for the safety of her son, or which may be believed to be conducive to his happiness, or which may be imagined to have the power of warding off any danger, real or imaginary. I wish to be pardoned for mentioning anything herein which may be improper according to our ideas of propriety in such matters, for I must give a faithful description. I have already omitted what appeared to be somewhat indecent.

If abortion has ever happened, or if there is any fear of it, besides the charms which they might get from the Syánás or “cunning men,” any one of the following articles is kept on the body of the woman with child to prevent abortion.

1. A small piece of wood taken from a scaffold on which some convict has been hanged.

2. A pice which has been thrown over the coffin (biwán)\* of an old man or woman.

3. Tiger’s flesh or nail.

As soon as a child is born, the midwife takes it away from the mother, and if it is a male says a girl is born, and if a girl then says “pathar” (stone) is born. “Pathar” so used means a girl, and the knowledge of the

\* [Properly the ‘bier;’ a corruption of Skr. विमान bimán. Ed.]

birth of a son is kept away from the mother for a time to prevent her feeling a sudden rapture of happiness.

The *dáyí* (midwife) washes the child with water put in an earthen pot (*thikrá*), in which must be thrown some silver before the midwife would give the child to the mother. Whether this means a sort of fictitious purchase to defeat the mischiefs of witchcraft, similarly as the ' *qbukáo* ' ceremony means an attack on the family of the bride and taking her away by force, (the primitive method of procuring wives), is a question which cannot be hastily answered. But it is a fact that the midwife does not give the male child to the mother until she is paid. For one day and a half the child draws no nourishment from its mother's breast. The pap must be washed by the sister of her husband, if there be any, before any nourishment can be given from it to the son. The husband's sister is paid according to means for this ceremony.

Throwing oil on the ground is the thing done on all auspicious occasions, probably to satisfy the demons of the earth. This is also sanctioned by Brahmanical ritual, and with them worship of the earth-gods to prevent the mischief of the demons inhabiting the lower strata of the earth is frequent. Oil is thrown under the bed of the mother, where green grass is also put, green grass (*dúb* <sup>دوب</sup> <sup>दूब</sup>) being the emblem of prosperity. It is also given by friends to the father of the new born child in congratulation of the birth of the son and indicates their good wishes to the new born.

To prevent any mischief to the child or the mother during the time of her confinement, the following precautions are taken :

I. Fire must be constantly kept in the room and should never be allowed to die out. The primitive Aryans were fire-worshippers and I think this is a remnant of their *hom* (<sup>होम</sup>) and other ceremonies now never practised except on marriage. The Gubars of Persia used to keep fires burning for hundreds of years, and it was most probably so in ancient India.

II. Grain must be kept near the bed of the mother. Grain represents plenty of good luck, which has a peculiar power of removing all evil.

III. Water should always remain in the room. It is the common belief that witches attack the unclean, and water being a purifier they cannot come near it. This belief is very general and is found as well in Islám as in Brahmanism. The Musalmáns have it on the highest authority that water is the purifier (<sup>الماء مطهر</sup>), so it is also according to Manu.

IV. Some weapon should also be placed near. It is believed that witches have no power over armed persons, but they attack the weak and the foul. It is from this belief that the bridegroom when marching at the head of a marriage procession must be armed, so that fairies being enamoured with him might not take him away. Those who are now deprived by

the Arms Act of carrying arms, carry a small knife instead, to frighten the fairies and spirits away.

V. The handle of the plough (*hal dá munná*) is kept under the bed. As the plough turns the soil from which grain is produced, witches do not approach such an implement.

VI. There should be a lock on the bed, or it should be chained round (*bel máriá*). Iron has great power of preventing the mischief of witchcraft, and a bed chained with iron is therefore quite safe.

VII. On no account should a cat be allowed to enter the room. Her cry even should not be heard by the mother. Some do not even let her name a cat (*billí*). The most unlucky dream for a woman in her confinement is that of seeing a cat. Some say that witches come in the disguise of a cat which should therefore not be allowed access, and others think that ‘*Aṭh máha*’ (اٹھ ماہہ), the habit of a child being born in the eighth month of pregnancy, is engendered by the fact of a cat entering the room of confinement. There are several stories in Oriental literature of sorceresses in love having gone to their beloved in the disguise of cats. I believe there is one in the Arabian Nights, but I have not got that book with me just now and cannot refer to it, and there is another in the Persian book justly called “a jewel in the necklace of a dog”, for referring to which I beg to be pardoned. It is in the first part of *Bahár Dánish* (بهار دانش) in the 6th story related to the prince. (Compare also Æsop’s Fable, No. 198). A child born during the eighth month of pregnancy is believed to die on the eighth day after birth, in the eighth month, the eighth year or the eighteenth year. When speaking of the age of a child, the number eight (*áṭh* اٹھ) is called “an *ginat*” ان گنت (uncounted) so

ان گنت دن	an-ginat din	=	8th day
ان گنت مہینہ	do. mahína	=	8th month
ان گنت برہا	do. barhá	=	8th year.

By the way I may mention here, a baby is called as many years old as he is days or months old—4 ‘*barhe*’,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ‘*barhá*’, &c. when applied to a small baby means that he is 4 days or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  months old. Returning to the unlucky pussy, if a cat happens to enter the room, ashes should be thrown over her to ward off the danger. In native sorcery, the common practice to drive witches away is by throwing enchanted grains, or ashes, or water over the object possessed, followed by the repetition of the charming words. For fairies flowers are used. For semi-gods like *Hanumán* and goddesses like *Deví* incense is burnt, and prayers substituted for charming words.

VIII. The house should not be swept clean by a broom, as this might have the effect of sweeping all the luck out of the room.

IX. There should also be no small opening for a drain (*morí*) in the

room of confinement. If there were it should be closed. For surely through it witches might enter, because it is from its nature unclean.

X. A lamp should be lit during night, and it should not be put out in the morning, but allowed to burn out. Putting a light out means extinguishing the light of good fortune. A son is called by the natives "Light of the house" (*ghar ká díwá*), for without him it would be all dark, the symbol of unhappiness.

XI. The mother and the baby must not on any account come out of the room for thirteen days. On the thirteenth day after birth, they are to come out of the room in the following manner. The mother takes a bath, and the old clothes worn by her are given away to the midwife employed, who divides them sometimes with the *náin* or barber woman. This *náin*, who is the customary maid-servant of the house, brings, in a small earthen pot (*ṭhikrá*), cow urine, green grass, a nut (*supará*), and the "*nabarná*" or instrument for cutting nails. After the mother has finished her toilet (which is a much simpler process than the toilet of European ladies) the '*náin*' sprinkles with green grass the cow urine on her person. Incense (*dhúp*) is burnt and nails are cut by the barber woman, which must not be cut previous to this day. The mother must put on the barber's (*nái's*),—not the barber woman's but her husband's—slippers. What does it mean? Perhaps she, coming out in the shoes of a servant, may be understood by the witches and other such beings not to be the lady of the house to whom they might cause any mischief; except this I cannot conjecture any other reason. Then the mother takes the child in her arms, and walks forth out of the room. The barber woman throws some oil on the door side and the water woman (*jbíwarí*, or any other) stands with a pot full of water and green grass; for these they are both duly paid according to the means of the lady. In the outer room the *Bidh Mátá* (بيده ماتا), the "*Vidhátá Mátá*" (विधानामता) of the learned, the goddess of generation is worshipped. The Bráhmans have no hand in this worship. The women form an idol of cow-dung (*gobar*), cover it with a red cloth and make their offerings to it, consisting of the food cooked for giving a feast on the occasion. It is to be observed that this is certainly a relic of the manners of those times when primitive Aryans worshipped their gods without the intervention of the priestly caste. Now, the Hindú gods would scarcely listen to prayers of the common folk, unless their cause were pleaded by the Bráhmans. Then drums are beaten, Bráhmans fed and a feast given to all the relatives present, and the members of the household congratulated. That idol is kept in the house till one and a quarter month after the day of birth and then deposited near the well.

This completes virtually all that is necessary for the proper care to be taken in the period of confinement which, however, lasts for forty days.

But the mother must not stain the palms of her hands or feet with the colour of the mahindí or hinná plant (*Lawsonia inermis*) and must not wear cloth coloured with kusumbha dye, until the ancestors are worshipped and a feast given to the kinsmen. On this occasion dhiyánís or the girls born in the tribe must also be fed, paid and revered. There is no limit of time as to when this grand feast is to be given.

Thenceforth nothing is to be feared except that dreadful goddess "small-pox." She must be periodically worshipped. Of the mode of her worship I will give a separate description; meanwhile suffice it to say that on her days and the days of her bír or follower, Tuesday and Saturday, the boy should not have a bath.

There is one other subject which I think must not remain altogether unnoticed. It is the influence of the evil eye, and what should be done to prevent the mischief caused thereby. Mothers naturally watch their sons with great anxiety. If at any time the baby refuses to take his nourishment, the first thought of the mother is, that he is under the influence of the evil eye. But to be sure whether this is so, she takes on a Saturday or Sunday *seven* red peppers, touches the person of the young one *seven* times with them, and without speaking to any one throws them in the fire. If they give out any odour whilst they burn, the baby is safe from the evil eye, but if no odour comes when the peppers burn, then it cannot be doubted that the young one has been looked at by some evil eye. If the mother, whilst touching him with the peppers, talks to any one, the charm is broken and must be done again. There is also one other method of finding this out, *viz.*, throwing dough wrapped round by cotton thread, after touching the child seven times with it, into the fire. If it burns without the threads being burnt, the boy is under the influence of the evil eye, but if the threads burn first, then the evil eye is not to be feared. This mode of ascertaining the evil eye is not so generally adopted as the one mentioned first. When it is thus found out that it is the evil eye which ails the baby, they then think out who it must be, whose eye fell on the child. Surely it can be no other than the person who stared at the child longest and who *praised* him most. Hence it is the rule with the friendly visitors not to praise the child much. If it be done so by any one, the mother or other friend of the baby takes a little earth in her hand and throws it across the child. Horse owners and dealers are also seen doing this, after some new comer has inspected the horse. When the person whose evil eye fell on the baby comes again, the child is hidden from his eye, and some earth from under the footsteps of the offending person is quietly taken and thrown in the fire. It may be observed that the native method is safer than the English which requires spilling of blood to remove the evil (see the Rev. A. Jessopp's Account of Superstition in Arcady in the Nineteenth

Century for November 1882). This will remove the influence of his eye. If it cannot be ascertained who was the person from whose look the child is suffering, recourse is had to the “cunning” man (syáná). He generally gives some charmed water with which the face of the baby and the breast of the mother is to be washed, or some charmed ashes which are applied to the forehead of the child, or anything else which he might think fit to administer. To prevent the mischief of the evil eye, the following precaution is thought to be ordinarily quite sufficient. When the child is going out, or when visitors are expected, or when he has been dressed in new clothes, his forehead or cheek is daubed with a small black mark. Anything black is believed to have the power of warding off the mischief of the evil eye. Thus they put black woollen collars (gaṇḍás) on the necks of beautiful horses, buffaloes, or oxen. It is also from this belief that those hideous black drawings representing old sorceresses, or demons, or witches, we so often see on the walls of newly built houses in the bazar, are drawn. Sometimes a picture of a black snake or fish on the wall is thought to be sufficient. I must stop here, for I have gone already far from my subject which was to give some account of the evil eye as connected with the well-being of children.

In conclusion I have to point out that the above related superstitions and beliefs are by no means peculiar to the Játs of any part of the country. The description given is of superstitions prevalent amongst the Játs of the Eastern Panjáb, and I have gathered the information from the most trustworthy sources, *i. e.*, from old native women. But I find that most of the above will hold good of *all* classes of inhabitants of the Panjáb with a few alterations here and there. I am informed that the Kshatrís, Bráhmans and Baniás of the towns are far more superstitious than are rural population. As to the extent to which such beliefs prevail, there are very few men who really believe in them, but there are very few women who do *not* believe in such things. So all such things are managed by women, and in most cases men do not come to know of them even.

It will appear that on the one hand some of these superstitious beliefs are the relics of old faiths and manners which have in some instances been incorporated in the modern religions, and on the other hand they are the absurd beliefs of an ignorant and credulous people. It is also manifest that the modern religions discard such superstitions. Yet all religions prevalent in the Punjáb, Hindúism, Sikhism, and Muhammadanism have failed to eradicate these superstitions, and it must be so until women are also educated and brought up like men. Truly, every candid native must confess that in India women have their own superstitious religion which does not practically differ much, whether they be nominally Hindús, Muhammadans or Sikhs.

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